WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An illumination device which comprises a light source and a light guide member having an entrance surface for receiving light coming from the light source, an exit surface for outputting light in an illumination direction, and a diffusion region for reflecting and/or diffusing an incoming light beam across a longitudinal direction, comprising diffusion means inserted in an optical path of light which is emitted by the light source and enters the entrance surface.

2. The device according to claim 1, wherein said device comprises a plurality of light sources, and said diffusion means is common to light beams coming from the plurality of light beams.

3. The device according to claim 1, wherein said diffusion means comprises a light diffusion surface formed on the entrance surface.

4. The device according to claim 1, wherein said diffusion means comprises a three-dimensionally patterned surface formed on the entrance surface.

5. The device according to claim 1, wherein said diffusion means comprises a three-dimensionally patterned surface formed on a surface of a resin which covers the light source.

6. The device according to claim 1, wherein said diffusion means comprises a scattering agent contained in a resin that covers the light source.

7. The device according to claim 2, wherein the plurality of light sources are integrally packaged.

8. The device according to claim 2, wherein the plurality of light sources comprise LEDs.

9. The device according to claim 8, wherein the plurality of LEDs have different emission wavelengths.

10. The device according to claim 9, wherein the plurality of LEDs respectively have red, green, and blue emission wavelengths.

11. An image sensor comprising an illumination device cited in claim 1, a lens for imaging optical information at a read position, and a photoelectric conversion element for receiving an optical image formed by said lens, and converting the optical image into an electrical signal.

12. An image reading apparatus comprising an image sensor cited in claim 11, and driving means for changing a relative position between said image sensor and an object to be read.

13. An information processing system comprising an image reading apparatus cited in claim 12, and an external information processing apparatus for controlling said image reading apparatus.